DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 623 JC 900 347

AUTHOR Kaikai, Septimus M.; Kaikai, Regina E.
TITLE Positive Ways To Avoid Instructor Burnout.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Successful College Teaching (Orlando, FL, February 28-March 3, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Administration; College Faculty; Community Colleges; *Faculty College Relationship; Faculty Development; *Teacher Alienation; Teacher Attendance; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Burnout; *Teacher Morale; Teacher Motivation; Teacher Promotion; Teacher Response; Teacher Welfare; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Multiple demands and pressures on teachers have increased instructor burnout, a state characterized by boredom, depression, envy, and physical and emotional fatigue. In response to the high incidence of burnout, teachers and professors may use a job diversification approach similar to one used in industry to combat boredom and monotony. Additionally, the following suggestions to instructors may help to alleviate burnout: (1) request and accept assignments to teach different courses at several levels in your major discipline; (2) engage in tutorial programs, community service, and volunteer activities that enhance teaching skills; (3) enhance knowledge sufficiently to be able to teach introductory courses in your disciplinary minor; (4) invite other professionals, resource people, and practitioners in the field to participate in classroom panel discussions; (5) become part of teaching teams or "inter-disciplinary" teams; (6) organize out-of-class activities for students each semester; and (7) use new delivery systems to vary and augment class presentations. The college administration can also assist instructors to overcome burnout by recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence. Nominating excellent teachers for external teaching awards; sponsoring faculty attendance at seminars, workshops, and conferences; promoting faculty for performance; and giving extra merit salary increments to teachers of recognized excellence are ways of rewarding faculty. The administration can also sponsor activities that enhance teaching; provide mentorship for faculty who exhibit signs of burnout; and promote a sense of community among faculty. (WJT)

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# POSITIVE WAYS TO AVOID INSTRUCTOR BURNOUT

by

Septimus M. Kaikai

and

Regina E. Kaikai

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Paper presented at the National Conference on Successful College Teaching (Orlando, Florida, February 28-March 3, 1990).

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# "POSITIVE WAYS TO AVOID INSTRUCTOR BURNOUT"

SEPTIMUS M. KAIKAI
Professor and Chairman
Business, Social Sciences, and Human Services Division
Catonsville Community College
Catonsville, Maryland 21228

REGINA E. KAIKAI, Ed.D.
Department of Elementary Education
Morgan State University
Baltimore, Maryland 21239

Faculty responsibility and accountability have taken on added significance with various reports and articles emphasizing the lack of preparedness of American students (Nation at Risk, 1983; Nation at Risk, 1984; Olesker, 1984). Societal recognition of the perilous nature of education led The National Commission on Excellence to observe in its report, "A Nation at Risk" (1984) that, by letting our educational system deteriorate, the United States has committed "acts of unilateral education disarmament." In addition to being urged to devise strategies and programs to stem the decline in student performance, tomorrow's school teachers have again been asked to become culturally literate in order to be able to deal with the multicultural classroom of the 1990's (Edwards, 1989/90, Williams, 1989/90; Rendon and Taylor, 1989/90; Watkins, 1989). The multiple demands on teachers have resulted in an environment of alienation and burnout.

Pines, Aronson, and Karfy (1981) define the term burnout as "the result of constant or repeated pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. Such intense involvement is particularly prevalent in health education and social service occupations, where professionals have a calling to take care of other people's psychological, social, and physical problems. Burnout is the painful realization that they can no longer help people in need." Michael Lauderdale (1982) defines burnout as taking "expectations of our jobs, careers, marriages, our lives and discovering that reality is less than our expectations."

The use of derogatory terms to describe students, boredom, depression, envy, fatigue in the form of physical and emotional exhaustion, desire to be doing something else, sense of isolation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and frequent inexplicable absenteeism are identified as characteristics of burnout (Altshuler and Richter, 1985).

The causes of burnout range from time constraints to accomplish multiple tasks, to feelings of not being adequately rewarded for one's efforts, to perceptions of one's profession being undervalued, to the lack of significance of what one does, to the pressure to adapt one's profession to changing technology (Ames and Watkins, 1983). Teaching several sections of the same subject matter each semester, reliving thoughts that the profession one is in was at best a secondary choice, and emoting an elitist attitude are other causes of burnout (Altshuler and Richter, 1985).

The incidence of burnout is most prevalent among social workers, teachers, and health care workers.

Monotony, boredom and burnout are terms previously associated with automation, specialization, factory work, and division of labor in industry. But specialization and division of labor are not limited to industry; educational institutions from pre-school to college also require specialization and division of labor. For example, educators have areas of specialization such as "reading education," "special education," "early childhood education," "elementary education," "secondary education," "math education," "art education," and "business education."

Industry's response to employee boredom and monotony is diversification in the workplace. Teachers and college professors could use a similar approach to resolve their problems of monotony. Instructors do not have to change careers or institutions in order to become rejuvenated. Sabbatical leave and professional development seminars alone will not solve the problem. Nor will changing from an instructor to an administrator necessarily solve the problem. In any event, there are not enough jobs in administration to absorb everyone; there are only a limited number of positions for departmental chairs, associate deans, deans, vice presidents and presidents of colleges. In light of this we might ask the question: What can professors and administrators do to rectify the problem of burnout?

No matter how innovative, creative, exciting, motivated, enthusiastic and energetic an instructor is, teaching four or five sections of the same course such as freshman English 101, Developmental Reading 101 or Accounting 101 for 10 or 15 years is bound to be boring. The following positive suggestions should help alleviate instructor burnout (Armour, 1987; Hunt, 1986; Gillespie, 1987; Ruckle, 1982; Perlberg and Kremer-Hayon, 1988).

1. Request and accept teaching assignments of different courses at several levels in your discipline. This request should be repeated every other year so that you teach a variety of courses. The benefit from engaging in this kind of activity will be that it will rekindle your creative juices and keep the adrenalin flowing. The research effort alone involved in preparing for a new course will breathe new excitement and curiosity into your intellectual life, and more importantly, the students will notice the difference. Preparing courses for the more mature and critical minds of juniors, seniors and graduate students will be enough to awaken even the lethargic, non-energetic, bored professor.

2. Update your "minor area of expertise" by engaging in tutorial programs, community service and volunteer activities that will enhance your teaching skills. This type of activity will strengthen your motivation. Obviously, teaching the non-traditional student of any age demands and generates more creativity and energy than teaching the regular traditional student.

3. Capitalize on the information available in journals, books, seminars, conferences, travel and courses to enhance your knowledge in your minor area in an effort to develop more competency. Your goal is to develop enough skill and knowledge in your minor area so that you can teach introductory courses in that discipline or subject area. Boredom will evaporate when you have to face competent graduate and undergraduate students who are "majors" and/or potential majors in your "minor." An advantage of teaching in your minor subject area is that it allows you to bring a different perspective to the course topics. A concomitant benefit of developing an expertise and teaching in other areas of specializations is that you make yourself more versatile and valuable to your department and educational institution.

4. Invite other professionals, resource people and practitioners in the field to participate in live classroom panel discussions with you as the moderator. Being the moderator encourages you, the instructor, to utilize and develop skills that will motivate you to perform in a different manner. The panel can give real-life perspectives to the regular topics presented in the textbook and supplementary readings. You will benefit from this activity because you will become energized by researching and selecting appropriate panelists. This process can be done several times during the academic year.

You can make the occasion as simple or elaborate as you wish. If you prefer to make it very special, you could invite

students from your other classes and other colleagues, serve refreshments, and allow selected "student experts" to add concluding statements at the end of the panel discussions. These panel discussions can be video-taped for presentation in future classes. In this way, you have resource materials which can be updated periodically. This updating activity would be another opportunity for you to break out of the monotonous pattern of just teaching the same basic courses.

5. Organize or become a part of a teaching team or "inter-disciplinary" team. You can do this by selecting one or two competent and motivated teachers to engage in team teaching of one of your courses on any level. The team can plan units, topics and materials together. Each of you can teach the course topics that excite you the most. Further, you can give each other new ideas and motivate and support each other. By initiating team teaching, you have already added variety to your regular routine. Each professor on the team will try to make sure he or she is using the most effective teaching strategies, as instructors do not like their peers to view their teaching performance as inadequate.

6. Organize out-of-class activities for your students each semester. Plan visits to the courthouse to hear cases argued by attorneys; the library to receive instruction in research methodology; the theatre to see professional performance of a play; the aquarium to expose students to sea mammals in a close-to-nature habitat; and the factory to see elements of operations management and division of labor at work.

7. Cross-train to teach in another discipline.

8. Engage in research for publication. The sense of seeing one's name in print is most euphoric and exhilarating.

9. Write and submit papers for presentation at seminars, workshops, and national conferences.

10. When occasioned, apply for non-teaching assignments, e.g., assistant-to-the president, assistant-to-the Dean, Department Chair, and program coordinator.

11. Request and accept a day and evening schedule. The background and motivation levels of the two groups are significantly different.

12. Request and accept teaching assignments for continuing education credit-free or non-credit courses.

13. Revise and update course syllabus and other materials annually. This creates an opportunity to be innovative, such as internationalizing your course.

14. Organize a Study-Abroad program evolving around a special topic, e.g., Education in an international perspective, Changing political climate, Technology and life, and Health Care Issues facing the World.

15. Apply to participate in a faculty exchange program locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

16. Use new delivery systems, such as videos, teleconferences, and "location shots" to vary and augment your class presentations.

Administrators can provide significant assistance in an effort to stem instructor burnout. The following suggestions

are considered to be appropriate administrative strategies to assist instructors overcome burnout.

1. Recognize and reward the significance of teaching by nominating excellent teachers for external teaching awards, sponsoring faculty attendance at seminars, workshops, and conferences, promoting faculty for excellent performance in teaching, and giving extra merit increments to identified and recognized excellent teachers.

2. Encourage and sponsor such interdisciplinary activities like Reading Across the Curriculum, Writing Across the Curriculum, Math Across the Curriculum, and Computing Across the Curriculum.

3. Develop and sponsor activities that enhance teaching. The sponsorship of staff development activities and the establishment of a Teaching Center will help to accomplish this strategy.

4. Provide internal and external recognition and publicity for faculty selected for excellence in teaching.

5. Provide mentorship for faculty who exhibit signs of burnout.

6. Provide assistance to faculty who need to revise and update syllabi and other course materials.

7. Promote a sense of community among faculty by encouraging the development of a uniform course syllabus, uniform text, uniform final exams, and roundtable discussions of discipline/departmental and program issues.

8. Sponsor faculty at Regional and National leadership workshops and conferences.

9. Respond quickly to signs of faculty burnout.

While these are only a few suggestions, efforts to adopt any one or all of them will help to minimize the negative effects of professional burnout and boredom. By engaging in, and supporting the above activities, faculty would be able to diversify their academic schedule, challenge their creativity, and become too busy to be bored or stagnant.

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